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There has been considerable publicity in the United States and Australia opposing the cigarette marketing efforts of British and U.S. tobacco companies in Eastern Europe. However, little attention has been paid to the marketing campaigns of the same companies in Western Europe, perhaps on the assumption that Western Europeans are too sophisticated to fall for the marketing tricks that have worked elsewhere over the last several decades. However, smoking rates are on the increase in many Western European countries, where tobacco advertising is largely unregulated. This paper analyzes magazine advertising for the Marlboro brand targeted at young adults in The Netherlands and Germany. We find that the same attractive smoking images, and some which may be even more insidious, are being actively promoted to young adults through free on-campus magazines and women's fashion and beauty magazines.

Disciplines

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Marlboro's Marketing in Western Europe: Is it Ethical?

Sandra C. Jones, University of Wollongong

Abstract

There has been considerable publicity in the United States and Australia opposing the cigarette marketing efforts of British and U.S. tobacco companies in Eastern Europe. However, little attention has been paid to the marketing campaigns of the same companies in Western Europe, perhaps on the assumption that Western Europeans are too sophisticated to fall for the marketing tricks that have worked elsewhere over the last several decades. However, smoking rates are on the increase in many Western European countries, where tobacco advertising is largely unregulated. This paper analyzes magazine advertising for the Marlboro brand targeted at young adults in The Netherlands and Germany. We find that the same attractive smoking images, and some which may be even more insidious, are being actively promoted to young adults through free on-campus magazines and women's fashion and beauty magazines.

Introduction

The Public Health Focus: Tobacco Marketing in Eastern Europe

Following the emergence of free trade in Eastern Europe, a series of government decisions have resulted in the state-owned, tobacco-producing monopolies in many of these countries being privatised or sold to Western companies. For these US- and UK-based companies facing decreasing sales and increasing pressure from the health lobby, the new sales opportunities in Eastern Europe have helped resuscitate profits.

There has been an ongoing campaign in the United States and Australia publicising the enormous marketing efforts of Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds and British American Tobacco in Eastern Europe (see for example, Holland, 1997; Weissman, 1992). Smoking rates in most of these countries are alarmingly high. In Russia, for example, 63% of men and 14% of women are current smokers (McKee *et al.*, 1998). It is argued that the East Europeans' lack of regulation and insufficient health warnings, for a population with poor understanding of the health effects of smoking and vulnerable to sophisticated marketing techniques of the tobacco giants, will push smoking rates even higher. These multinational companies are described as ready to "profit from Eastern Europeans' ignorance" (Weissman, 1992). Largely as a result of this international public health publicity, parts of Eastern Europe are already moving towards the eradication of tobacco promotion. For example, Poland has strict restrictions on all forms tobacco promotion (Green, Nathan and Mercer, 2001) and Hungary has prohibited direct and indirect advertising of tobacco through print media since July 2001 and outdoor advertising since January 2002 (Szilagyi, 2002).

The Public Health Blind Spot

With all this emphasis on Eastern Europe, aside from the occasional journal article, there has been little attention paid to the marketing efforts of the tobacco companies in *Western* Europe. This neglect is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that Western Europeans are seen as educated and enlightened – as compared with the "ignorant" Eastern Europeans. However,

smoking rates in many of these Western European countries are also extremely high, and the restrictions on tobacco advertising equally lax. This paper reviews tobacco advertising in two such countries: The Netherlands and Germany.

Smoking Prevalence

Table 1 provides figures on smoking prevalence in both of the countries, and, for comparison, nearby Belgium, for both youth and adults (adapted from Corrao *et al.*, 2000). As shown in the table, smoking prevalence for both males and females is lowest in Belgium (where tobacco advertising is prohibited); the highest rate for males is in Germany and the rate for females is equal in Germany and The Netherlands. The most interesting statistics, however, are for the recent changes in per capita consumption. In Belgium, per capita consumption remained fairly static between 1990 and 1995 (figures were not available for 1998). In Germany per capita consumption declined considerably between 1990 and 1998 (from 2,171 to 1,702 cigarettes annually), but remains very high in terms of present smoking rates (43% of adult males and 30% of adult females). In The Netherlands per capita cigarette consumption doubled between 1990 and 1998 (from 1,154 to 2,323).

Table 1: Smoking rates and per capita consumption by country

	Youth ¹ smokers (% of population)		Adult ² smokers (% of population)		Per capita consumption	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	1990	1998 ³
The Netherlands (1998)	13	10	37	30	1,154	2,323
Belgium (1999)	9	9	31	26	2,350	2,428
Germany (1997/98)	11	11	43	30	2,171	1,702

¹ Categorized as 10-14 years old in The Netherlands, and 11-15 in Belgium and Germany

² Categorized as 15+ in The Netherlands and Belgium, and 18-59 in Germany

³ 1995 for Belgium

Smoking Mortality

Between 1975 and 1998, smoking deaths among men in these three countries have decreased (Germany, from 109,000 to 88,000 per annum; Belgium, from 18,000 to 14,000 per annum), or remained static (The Netherlands, 21,000 per annum). However, over the same period, smoking deaths among women have increased in all three countries: a 10% increase in Belgium, from 1,000 to 1,100; almost 300% in Germany, from 7,100 to 20,000; and 4,000% in The Netherlands, from 100 to 4,100).

The Marlboro Man

The “personification of evil” in the public health reaction to the influx of Western tobacco to Eastern Europe is Philip Morris’s Marlboro Man (Holland, 1997; Weissman, 1992). The Marlboro Man won first place among *Ad Age*’s Top 100 Ad Icons: “The most powerful – and in some quarters, most hated – brand image of the century, the Marlboro Man stands worldwide as the ultimate American cowboy and masculine trademark, helping establish Marlboro as the best-selling cigarette in the world” (*Ad Age*, 2001).

Importantly, as pointed out by *Ad Age*, the Marlboro Man is such a well-established icon that “no matter how minimal the imagery gets – reduced on occasion to little more than a saddle and a splash of red – it still remains instantly evocative of a mythical Marlboro country, of a

mythical American cowboy and of the No. 1 brand of cigarettes" (*Ad Age*, 2001). It is indeed fortunate for Philip Morris that the icon goes beyond the man himself (the actor who sits in the Marlboro saddle), as at least two of the Marlboro men have had the temerity to die from the hand that fed them; both Wayne McLaren and David McLean died from lung cancer (Business Wire, 1996; Johnson, 1992).

The Marlboro Man and young people

As late as 1990, Philip Morris was openly targeting Marlboro at younger smokers: "...23% of the population is 15 years of age and under. 17% is 16-24 years of age. Given predisposition to try/adopt new brands, this segment represents significant market opportunity...Overall objective: Position Marlboro as a 'cult' brand – to attract new smokers" (Leo Burnett USA, 1990).

The Marlboro Man in the United States

Marlboro remains the "brand of choice" for youth smokers in the U.S., with 55% of youth smokers naming Marlboro as their usual brand (SAMHSA, 2002). A survey of 1,005 adults and 507 teens (aged 12-17) in March 2002 found that only 13% of adults – but 39% of teens – recalled seeing Marlboro advertising in the last two weeks (Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, 2002). A study by the American Legacy Foundation found that eight of the top 10 advertised cigarette brands were seen five or more times by at least 70% of U.S. 12 to 17 year olds, and Marlboro ads five or more times by 89% (Oklahoma State Department of Health, 2000).

Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to examine the use of the Marlboro Man as an advertising tool in publications targeting young people (i.e., under 25) in Germany and The Netherlands. A selective sample of magazines that targeted young people (either distributed free on university campuses, or predominantly targeted at young people) and carried cigarette advertisements were examined for Marlboro advertisements. The magazines were chosen by asking a convenience sample of university students in each country which magazines they read.

The magazines in the sample were:

The Netherlands: *Memory Magazine* (April-May 2002) – distributed free on campus; *Sum* (April-May 2002 and June-July 2002) – distributed free on campus; *Veronica* (June 2002) – monthly TV magazine; *Cosmopolitan* (June 2002); and *Viv* (3-9 June 2002).

Germany: *Audimax* (June 2002) – distributed free on campus; *Fritz* (June 2002) – a free guide to music, events, films and sports; *TV Movie* (15-28 June 2002) – fortnightly TV magazine; *Cosmopolitan* (June 2002); *Glamour* (June 2002); and *Allegra* (June 2002)

Results

The Netherlands

Of the 16 cigarette ads identified, six were for Marlboro. All of the ads carried the mandated health warning, which is required to be written in Dutch and appears in a white border at the bottom of all cigarette ads: "Smoking seriously damages your health. kb.4.10.1994, stb 720". All other text in all six ads was in English.

One of the ads (*Sum*, April-May 2002) was designed to promote the new soft pack and featured a full-page pack shot with the text: "New. The original Marlboro Soft Pack".

The five remaining ads featured the stereotypical Marlboro Man (or Men). The ad which appeared in both *Cosmopolitan* and *Memory Magazine* featured a silhouette of a cowboy jumping onto his horse at sunset, and the only text was the single word "Marlboro". The other three ads (each of which appeared once) featured an action shot of two cowboys lassoing a wild horse (*Sum*, June-July 2002); an action shot of three cowboys galloping across a river (*Veronica*, June 2002); and a double-page silhouette of six cowboys at sunset returning to their campsite. All three of these ads had the same text: "Come to Marlboro Country."

Germany

Of the 15 cigarette ads identified, seven were for Marlboro. All of the ads carried the mandated health warnings, which are required to be written in German. The main warning, which appears in a white border at the bottom of all cigarette ads, reads: "The E.G. Ministries of Health: Smoking is dangerous for your health. The smoke of one cigarette of this brand contains XXmg of nicotine and XXmg tar. (Average value after ISO¹)". The second warning, integrated into the ad itself, advised that the amount of tar and nicotine inhaled depends on the individual's smoking style.

One of the ads (*Glamour*, June 2002) featured a full-page pack shot, with the pack and a lighter lying on a flat surface, and no other images. Unlike the campaign from The Netherlands, only one of the seven German ads featured the Marlboro Man (*Allegra*, June 2002). This was an ad for Marlboro Lights, and was a photograph of two cowboys galloping after a wild horse under a bright blue sky dotted with fluffy clouds. It is possible that this may be due to the perceived need to develop ads which do not feature people, following the ban on using people in cigarette advertising in several other countries.

All five of the other ads were part of a promotional campaign that is not immediately recognisable as cigarette advertising – other than the presence of the government health warning. The ads all featured rural American scenes, each with a prominent signpost. One ad (*Audimax*, June 2002) was a photograph of an open road with a road sign that reads "Work Ahead. Be Prepared." The other four ads featured signs advertising specific vacancies – such as a photograph of an outback motel where the neon sign reads "Born Jim Hotel. Needed: Receptionist" (*TV Movie*, 15-28 June 2002), and a photograph of an old-style gas tank with a cardboard sign attached to it which reads "Need Help Fixing Cars" (*Fritz*, June 2002).

All of these ads were branded "Marlboro Summer Jobbing" and included an 0800 number to call. It appears Marlboro has entered the job placement industry! The text in each ad varies

¹ International Standards Organisation

depending on the specific scene depicted, but the gist is the same. A sample translation (Audimax, June 2002) reads: "This summer could be the best of your lifetime. In Marlboro Country, a land in which freedom and adventure are at home, hundreds of jobs wait for you. Whether as a Ranch Hand, Trail Builder, Horse Trainer Assistant, Mechanic or Motel Receptionist – as a "Summer jobber" you are able to get to know the Southwest of the USA and its population for real. You will have lots of memories which you will never forget. Call and apply (for a summer job) – on your own or with your best friend. And with some luck, you will leave in a couple of days."

Discussion

Marlboro was the most advertised cigarette brand in the sample of magazines studied, in both countries. The fact that these magazines were those targeted at young people (e.g., those given away on university campuses), and particularly young women (five of the 12 magazines were young women's fashion and beauty magazines), suggests that Philip Morris has maintained its positioning for Marlboro advertising to young adults.

The Marlboro Man image, while tarnished at home, remains strong in Western Europe. Philip Morris continues to promote the image of the Marlboro Man as the quintessential American cowboy, and is relying on the young Europeans' fascination with all things American as a powerful marketing appeal. In the Netherlands this is evident in the use of the same imagery that has long been used in the U.S., and the use of English language – rather than Dutch – text (a strategy also used by other tobacco brands, such as Lucky Strike, but not by other multinational brands such as hair care and beauty products). Interestingly, none of the six "Marlboro Man" ads showed the cowboy actually smoking, although this image was prevalent in the billboard advertising in both countries.

The Marlboro campaign in Germany is very different from that in The Netherlands, and from the traditional Marlboro campaigns, appearing to promote Marlboro more as a job placement agency than a cigarette manufacturer. However, the underlying imagery and, we argue, the *effect* of the campaign is similar. It is likely that very few German students will actually make the phone call and travel to America to take up a position as a Ranch Hand or Trail Builder. However, the German "Marlboro Summer Jobbing" campaign effectively associates the cigarette brand with the same traditional, rural America in which "freedom and adventure are at home."

In conclusion, the same attractive smoking images as those used for many decades in America are being actively promoted to young adults in Western Europe through free on-campus magazines and women's fashion and beauty magazines. This approach is typified by the market leader, Marlboro. Marlboro campaigns continue to associate their cigarettes with the rugged, adventurous American outback. Additionally, the Marlboro campaign in the Netherlands (like those for several other cigarette brands) associates smoking with *being* American – a desirable characteristic for many young Europeans. The Marlboro campaign in Germany promotes the opportunity to travel to America and work in the outback as a way of reinforcing the brand image.

The ethicality of both of these campaigns is questionable, with similarities to the controversial Nestle campaign for infant formula in the third world which promoted the (health-damaging) feeding of babies with formula as "Western" and therefore intrinsically better than breast

feeding. Future research in this area should examine the marketing practices of tobacco companies in general and ensure that they are not exporting campaigns to other countries which have already been banned in their home country. Public health activists and marketing ethicists opposing tobacco marketing in Eastern Europe should perhaps cast their eyes westward!

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